



LINN

Rachel Baptist
Ireland's Black Syren

PETER WHELAN IRISH BAROQUE ORCHESTRA
RACHEL REDMOND



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Ireland's Black Siren

PETER WHELAN director
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RACHEL REDMOND soprano

George Frideric Handel (1685–1759)

Sinfonia (from *Samson*, HWV 57)

1. Andante 3:16
2. Allegro 1:38
3. Menuetto 2:18
4. **Mirth, admit me of thy crew** 3:45
(from *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, HWV 55)
5. **Softly sweet in Lydian measures** 3:25
(from *Alexander's Feast*, HWV 75)

Alla Caccia 'Diana cacciatrice', HWV 79

6. La Marche 1:41
7. Recitativo: Alla caccia 0:34
8. Aria: Foriera la tromba 3:36
9. Coro: Alla caccia° 1:54

Niccolò Pasquali (c. 1718–1757)

Overture (from *The Grand Festino*)*

10. Allegro 1:55
11. Larghetto 1:38
12. Presto 2:05
13. **Let earth and air and ocean** 3:10
(from *The Triumphs of Hibernia*)*
14. **Nature first played well her part** 7:03
(from *Nymphs of the Springs*)*

Francesco Geminiani (1687–1762)

15. **Concerto grosso in D minor 'La Folia'**, Op. 5 No. 12 11:42

Henry Purcell (c. 1659–1695)

16. **Fairest isle** (from *King Arthur*) 5:29

° AISLING KENNY echo soprano

* PREMIERE RECORDING

Total Running Time 55:13

Rachel Baptist

Ireland's Black Syren

On 25 July 1752, a notice appeared in *The Dublin Journal* advertising a 'Grand Concert of Vocal and Instrumental Musick' for 'the Benefit of Miss Baptist'. Set to take place the following month at the fashionable pleasure garden of Marlborough Green (near the present-day site of the Abbey Theatre), audience members were promised 'several new songs', a solo and concerto led by violinist Samuel Lee, along with concertos for French horn, the concert concluding with the usual exhibition of 'Grand Fire-Works'. Tickets were available for purchase from the venue itself, from a print-shop on Cork Hill (beside Dublin Castle), and from 'Miss Baptist's Lodgings in Grangegorman-lane' at the western fringe of the city.

Who was this singer, 'Miss Baptist' (or 'Baptiste'), who enjoyed enough standing in Dublin's musical circles to organize her own benefit concert? Evidence is limited, but what is known about her is tantalizing. One of the best descriptions of her from this time is by the writer and performer John O'Keeffe. He recalled attending concerts at Marlborough Green as a boy: 'among the many fine singers there was Rachel Baptiste, a real black woman, a native of Africa: she always appeared in the orchestra in a yellow silk gown, and was heard by the applauding company with great delight, without remarks upon her sables.' The reference to 'her sables' indicates her dark complexion, and the lack of response to this – reflecting the apparent tolerance of Dublin audiences – was itself worthy of comment. However, while Rachel Baptist may ultimately have been of African descent, her own origins did not stretch that far. The first reference to Baptist in print, advertising her presence in a benefit

concert for her teacher, Bernardo Palma, in early 1750, describes her and fellow-artist Miss Pocklington as ‘Natives of this Country’, suggesting they were both born in Ireland.

Rachel Baptist’s presence in Dublin made her one of as many as possibly 1,000 to 3,000 black people living in Ireland during the latter half of the eighteenth century. These were mostly descended from enslaved people who themselves had been transported from West Africa to the Caribbean and other parts of the Americas. Ireland was not directly involved in the trans-Atlantic slave trade, but it was nevertheless part of the wider ‘Atlantic World’, and the Irish economy was heavily invested in the commerce of slave-produced goods, notably sugar. The Irish role in Atlantic trade was not confined to the networks of the British Empire, and included trade with and, in some cases, ownership of plantations located in Danish, Dutch and, most especially, French colonies. When freed, a slave needed to choose a surname under which to be registered (their original family name having been long lost), and ‘Baptiste’ – a common name in France at this time – suggests that Rachel Baptist was possibly descended from slaves freed in a French Caribbean colony such as Saint-Domingue (now Haiti) or Guadeloupe. Trade links between Ireland and France were extensive during this period and, where goods circulated, people followed. Newspaper records attest to the presence of black people throughout Ireland at this time, employed largely as domestic servants, but there were black musicians and stage performers as well. Of these, Rachel Baptist is one of very few whose name survives.

She sang regularly in Dublin between 1750 and 1753, with twice-weekly appearances every summer at Marlborough Green, as well as performances at

Crow Street Music Hall and the Theatre Royal, Smock Alley. Her appearances lessened in the next three years, and the last time she is recorded performing in Dublin is at a concert in July 1756, which included the oratorio *The Triumphs of Hibernia*. She then moved to England, where she is occasionally listed giving concerts in London, Bath, Liverpool, and other provincial centres, before returning to Ireland. Her return (married, as 'Mrs Crow') was heralded by a successful set of concerts at the Tholsel, Kilkenny, in December 1767, which led to performances in Clonmel and Limerick. Now called the 'Celebrated Black Syren', her appearance in Kilkenny coincided with that of the castrato Giusto Ferdinando Tenducci, alongside performances by Thomas Ryder's acclaimed touring theatre company. Responding to this rich array of talent, *Finn's Leinster Journal* described Kilkenny as being 'a Capua, a town of Pleasure, rather than a town of Trade'. After this, Baptist's career continued a few years more, and the last that is heard of this singer is in listings for concerts given at Belfast, Lisburn, and Carrickfergus in April 1773.

Her many performances at Marlborough Green brought her into contact with musicians from Smock Alley Theatre, notably the countertenor Daniel Sullivan with whom she regularly performed. Her repertoire, typical for a singer at the pleasure gardens, would have drawn on traditional Irish and Scottish airs, popular theatre songs, and arias from cantatas and oratorios, including pieces by George Frideric Handel, William Boyce, Thomas Arne and Niccolò Pasquali.

Samson, completed by Handel shortly before he travelled to Dublin, eventually had its premiere there in February 1748. This was directed by violinist Matthew Dubourg, who had also led the first performance of the oratorio in London in 1743. *Samson* was regularly heard in Dublin from this time, both later

again in 1748, and every year up to 1753. Handel's *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato* and *Alexander's Feast* were each presented in Dublin by the composer himself during his stay in 1741–42, and both were frequently revived in the years that followed.

The pastoral ode *L'Allegro* sets (and interweaves) verses from John Milton's poems 'L'Allegro' and 'Il Penseroso', balancing competing themes of mirth and melancholy. Allegra, having banished Melancholy, compares her freedom to that of the morning lark as she sings 'Mirth, admit me of thy crew', her soprano voice matched by the brilliantly soaring lines of the violins. *Alexander's Feast*, setting John Dryden's panegyric on the power of music, includes the calmly poised soprano aria 'Softly sweet in Lydian measures', its evocative mood echoed by the accompanying cello solo. Dating back to Handel's apprentice years in Italy, the cantata *Diana cacciatrice* (Diana the Huntress) was commissioned by Handel's early patron, Marchese Francesco Maria Ruspoli, for performance at his country palazzo. The cantata's hunting theme, enlivened with classical references and the heroic pairing of soprano and trumpet, honoured Ruspoli and his love of hunting.

The violinist and composer Francesco Geminiani was the most famous of the many Italian musicians who spent time in Dublin during the mid-eighteenth century. His twelve concerti grossi, arrangements of Arcangelo Corelli's Op. 5 sonatas, appeared in London in two volumes during the 1720s. The final work of this collection is the Concerto grosso No. 12 in D minor, a fine arrangement of Corelli's celebrated variations on 'La Folia'. Another Italian musician who worked in Dublin was Niccolò Pasquali, brought there from London in 1748 by Thomas Sheridan, manager of the Smock Alley Theatre, to direct the theatre's

music. In his three years in Ireland, Pasquali composed music for three masques, including *The Triumphs of Hibernia*, along with music for productions of several of Shakespeare's plays at Smock Alley, and an overture to Pergolesi's *Stabat Mater* for its Irish premiere (which Pasquali directed) in 1749.

Pasquali published collections of overtures and English songs on his return to London, with music from his time in Dublin. This included the overture to an entertainment described as a 'Grand Festino in the Italian Manner' (given at Aungier Street Theatre in 1748 to celebrate the birthday of King George II), as well as the song 'Nature first played well her part' from *Nymphs of the Springs* – the only part of this masque, apart from its overture, to survive. While the 1756 performance of *The Triumphs of Hibernia* – in which Rachel Baptist performed – was described as 'a new Oratorio', it is likely that this drew on Pasquali's earlier masque, especially as the text of the soprano air 'Let earth and air and ocean' is in the libretto of that work.

Of all Henry Purcell's music for the theatre, the patriotic semi-opera *King Arthur* proved especially popular throughout the eighteenth century and was often revived at Smock Alley Theatre, with performances in 1750 and 1753. Its closing sequence features a masque in praise of Britannia, with songs and dances, during which Venus enters, singing 'Fairest isle, all isles excelling, seat of pleasure and of love'.

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4. Mirth, admit me of thy crew

Mirth, admit me of thy crew,
To live with her, and live with thee,
In unreproved pleasures free:
To hear the lark begin his flight,
And singing startle the dull night:
Then to come, in spite of sorrow,
And at my window bid good morrow:
Mirth, admit me of thy crew!

5. Softly sweet in Lydian measures

Softly sweet in Lydian measures,
Soon he sooth'd the soul to pleasures.

Diana cacciatrice

6. La Marche

7. Alla caccia, alla caccia,
o mie ninfe seguaci,
pria che il sol coi suoi raggi il giorno indori,
l'armi ogn'una prepari,
e il can veloce al proprio branco affidi.
Già son pronti i destrieri:
andiam su liete alla vicina selva,
dei cignali alla preda e d'ogni belva.

8. Foriera la tromba

la meta c'addita,
col suono c'invita
a un sì lieto dì.
E allorché rimbomba
con voce scolpita,
un'eco l'imita,
dicendo così:
Foriera la tromba ...

Diana the huntress

[Sinfonia]

*To the hunt, to the hunt,
O nymphs that follow me,
before the sun's rays gild the day
let each of you prepare your weapons and
assign your speedy dog to its proper pack.
The horses are now ready:
let us go joyfully to the forest nearby
to hunt boars and any other wild beast.*

*The signalling trumpet
shows the way,
its sound invites us
to this joyous day.
And when it blares
with its sculpted voice,
it is imitated by an echo,
calling like this:
The signalling trumpet ...*

9. **Alla caccia**, alla caccia,
mie fide compagne,
e solo un momento
ognuna dal core
del nume d'amore
si privi e disfaccia.

Di questa selva fra dubbie vie
Melampo fido sia scorta al piè.
Nulla pavento, sia notte o die,
mentre sicura son di sua fè.

Alla caccia ...

*To the hunt, to the hunt,
my faithful companions,
and just for a moment
let all of you banish
and disable from your hearts
the god of love.*

*Along the uncertain paths of this forest
let the trusty Melampo guide my feet.¹
I fear nothing, whether night or day,
as I am sure of his loyalty.*

To the hunt ...

Translation by David Vickers, 2023

¹ Melampo is the beloved dog of the avid hunter Silvio in Guarini's *Il pastor fido* (Act II scene 2); its name was derived from Melampus, one of Actaeon's hounds in Book III of Ovid's *Metamorphoses*.

13. **Let earth and air and ocean**

Let earth and air and ocean join;
In one exalted lay!
And, like the subject, be divine,
The honours all shall pay.

14. **Nature first played well her part**

Nature first played well her part,
In this rural healthful place,
Then did follow envious art;
Drest in pomp, with ev'ry grace.

Doubtful stares the strangers eye!
Looks at nature! Looks at art!
Both in bright perfection vye
to decide would be in vain:
Each deserves o'er BATH to reign.

16. Fairest isle

Fairest isle of isles excelling, seat of pleasures and of loves,
Venus here will choose her dwelling, and forsake her Cyprian groves.
Cupid, from his fav'rite nation, care and envy will remove;
Jealousy, that poisons passion and despair that dies for love.
Gentle murmurs, sweet complaining, sighs that blow the fire of love,
Soft repulses, kind disdain, shall be all the pains you prove.
Every swain shall pay his duty, grateful every nymph shall prove;
And as these excel in beauty, those shall be renown'd for love.

PETER WHELAN director

Olivier Award-winner Peter Whelan is among the most dynamic and versatile exponents of historical performance of his generation, with a remarkable career as a conductor and director. He is Artistic Director of the Irish Baroque Orchestra as well as Curator for Early Music of Norwegian Wind Ensemble. Whelan is an acclaimed solo artist with an extensive and award-winning discography as a solo bassoonist.

As conductor, Whelan has a particular passion for exploring and championing neglected music from the Baroque and Classical eras. Engagements have included appearances with The English Concert, Scottish Chamber Orchestra, Beethoven Orchester Bonn, Netherlands Chamber Orchestra, Portland Baroque Orchestra, Lahti Symphony Orchestra, Oulu Symphony Orchestra and Orchestre de Chambre du Luxembourg.

The 2022–23 season saw Whelan conducting Vivaldi's seldom performed *Bajazet* with Irish National Opera. This production was met with outstanding reviews and Peter Whelan and the Irish Baroque Orchestra won an Olivier Award for 'Outstanding Achievement in Opera'. He made his debut at San Francisco Opera, conducting Gluck's *Orfeo ed Euridice*. Other opera productions have included *The Marriage of Figaro*, *Magic Flute* and *Acis and Galatea* with Irish National Opera and Handel's *Radamisto* with English Touring Opera.

Orchestral highlights include the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Royal Northern Sinfonia, Dunedin Consort, la festa musicale, Meininger Hofkapelle and Kristiansand Symphony Orchestra. Whelan has returned to Irish National Opera to conduct a production of Vivaldi's rarely performed *L'Olimpiade* in May 2024.

IRISH BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

The Olivier Award-winning Irish Baroque Orchestra is celebrated as Ireland's flagship period instrument orchestra and delivers world-class historically-informed performances across Ireland and abroad. Under the artistic direction of Peter Whelan, scholarship and musical excellence converge in a unique way through the IBO's work, creating an original offering like no other organization on the Irish classical music scene. Through this integration of research and practice the very idea of an orchestra is defined afresh, providing an unusual and enriching experience for today's audiences.

As an ambassador for the stories of Ireland's musical past, the IBO uses its unique perspective to develop the growing store of knowledge surrounding the very early days of Baroque and Classical music in Ireland. The IBO's research, recordings and performances offer audiences across Ireland a new opportunity to reevaluate and reclaim their cultural heritage, while also engaging the Irish diaspora through the increasing global reach of this work. Even Handel's *Messiah* – an annual touring highlight in the IBO calendar – is a rekindled link to Dublin's cultural life in 1742.

The IBO is generously funded by the Arts Council / An Chomhairle Ealaíon. It also receives financial support from Culture Ireland to support an expanding international profile. The orchestra has its own collection of period instruments, purchased with the assistance of an Arts Council capital grant and the Department of Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht. The IBO is resident at the National Concert Hall, Dublin and as of 2021 is an ensemble and Board member of the Réseau Européen de Musique Ancienne (European Early Music Network).

RACHEL REDMOND soprano

Rachel Redmond trained at the Royal Conservatoire of Scotland and the Guildhall School of Music & Drama and began her career in William Christie's Jardin des Voix. With Les Arts Florissants she has regularly sung Couperin's *Leçons de ténèbres*, Handel *L'Allegro, il Penseroso ed il Moderato*, and many works by Bach, Charpentier, Monteverdi, Mondonville, Purcell and Rameau.

Redmond made her stage debut at the Opéra Comique in Lully's *Atys*, followed by *Les fêtes vénitiennes* in Paris, Toulouse and New York, Second Woman in *Dido and Aeneas* at Festival d'Aix-en-Provence, Lœna in *La belle Hélène* at the Théâtre du Châtelet and Fortuna in *L'incoronazione di Poppea* at Opéra national du Rhin. For her debut as Susanna in *The Marriage of Figaro* with English Touring Opera she was nominated for The Times Breakthrough Award.

Redmond has performed regularly at the Internationale Händel-Festspiele Göttingen and the London Handel Festival. At Salzburg Festival she sang *Messiah* under Jordi Savall, and *Indian Queen* and Mozart's Mass in C minor under Teodor Currentzis. Other highlights have included Reinhard Keiser's *Brockes Passion* and Carl Heinrich Graun's *Der Tod Jesu* with Netherlands Bach Society, Handel's *Dixit Dominus* with Il Gardellino and Flemish Radio Choir, Handel's *Esther* with Le Stagioni, Bach's Mass in B minor with the Orchestra of the Age of Enlightenment, Purcell's *Welcome to all the pleasures* and Handel's Chandos Anthem No. 6 with Freiburg Baroque Orchestra, Bach's Christmas Oratorio with Dunedin Consort and with the Gulbenkian Orchestra and Fauré's Requiem with Polyphony. Redmond made her debut with the prestigious Canadian ensemble Tafelmusik in performances of *Messiah* and with Irish National Opera singing Aminta in Vivaldi's *L'Olimpiade*.

IRISH BAROQUE ORCHESTRA

VIOLIN 1	Michael Gurevich, Alice Earll, Marja Gaynor, Sophia Prodanova
VIOLIN 2	Huw Daniel, Anita Vedres, Rachael Masterson
VIOLA	Pablo de Pedro Cano, Martha Campbell
CELLO	Jonathan Byers, Carina Drury
DOUBLE BASS	Malachy Robinson
HORN	Anneke Scott, Joseph Walters
OBOE	Clara Espinosa, Lucile Tessier
LUTE	Sergio Bucheli
TRUMPET	Darren Cornish Moore
TIMPANI	Richard O'Donnell
ORGAN	Malcolm Proud

ARTISTIC DIRECTOR	Peter Whelan
CHIEF EXECUTIVE OFFICER	Aliye Cornish Moore
ORCHESTRA MANAGER	Doireann Kelly
DEVELOPMENT OFFICER	Alison Byrne
KEYBOARD TECHNICIAN	Marc Venturier

PATRON	The President of Ireland/Uachtarán na hÉireann Michael D. Higgins
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We are especially grateful to our Rachel Baptist Champions for supporting us in bringing the Rachel Baptist story and music to life in 2024: Rhoda Draper, Carol Reynolds, Simon Boyle, Val Keegan, Paddy Morton, Siobhan O’Beirne, Geoffrey Keating, Peter Roycroft, Garret Cahill, Jürgen Uhlich, Elizabeth Hilliard, Annick Smith, Tony Baines, Isobel Bailey, Garret Dalton, Sean Tester, Cathy Brown, Garry Hynes, Kenneth Langan and several donors who wish to remain anonymous.

We would like to acknowledge the work of Brian Clark in preparing the performing edition for the Overture to *The Grand Festino* and David Byers for allowing use of *Let earth and air and ocean*.

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Recording Producer & Engineer

Philip Hobbs

Post-production

Julia Thomas

Label Manager

Timothée van der Stegen

Design

Valérie Lagarde

Cover Image

‘Portrait of a Young Woman’ by Jean-Etienne Liotard (1702–1789)

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